Sometimes students are challenged by one or more factors and feel like they are the only ones in that situation. The important thing is to identify the challenge and contact the subject teacher or support teacher and remember that others are also facing these common hindering challenges.

Peter Cole is a researcher and policy analyst with the Curriculum Advisory Board, the State Board of Education and the Victorian Institute of Secondary Education who researched some of these common factors.

Factors hindering student learning in the VCE

The following is an extract from a research report by Peter Cole on VCE/VCAL. If you can relate to any of these factors or, as a parent/supervisor you can identify one or more of these factors in your child or student, please contact the child’s student support teacher or subject teacher. DECV teachers are well trained to implement strategies that will assist students to overcome many of these hindering factors.

Teachers within the focus groups were asked to list some of the factors that hinder learning in the VCE. They advised that struggling students generally have the following characteristics. Struggling students generally:

- do not have the writing skills needed to express their ideas succinctly and clearly.
- have difficulty organising their time in ways that enable them to meet homework and study commitments and keep up with course work.
- do not place high enough priority on their studies (e.g. part-time work often takes precedence over study).
- lack the cultural experience of other students (e.g. many students have never been to the theatre and do not know about events in Australian history that are ‘common knowledge’ for other students).
- have difficulty interpreting examination questions because of an inadequate academic vocabulary or poor comprehension skills.
- have difficulty in grasping theoretical constructs and highly abstract concepts.
- have difficulty applying their knowledge in different and unfamiliar contexts.
- have difficulty recognising what formula or process needs to be used when responding to an examination question.
- are sporadic in their efforts to learn and have difficulty sustaining a commitment to learning.
- do not know how to revise their learning or how to use their study time effectively.
• do not apply themselves to memorising key facts that are essential for understanding of the subject.
• are reluctant to ask for additional help, sometime out of disinterest and sometimes out of embarrassment.
• have made a poor subject selection. (They may have been poorly counselled about subject selection, ignored counselling advice, selected a subject because they thought it was easy, or because of the timetable limitations were forced to select a subject that they had little aptitude for or interest in.)
• have low expectations of success and so are easily discouraged if they find the work required too challenging.
• are less likely to take up opportunities, such as after-school catch-up and review classes and homework groups, that are provided to supplement classroom learning opportunities and help promote improved understanding.
• do not know what it means to be an independent learner and do not have the skills to take responsibility for their own learning. (e.g. It was commented that ‘some students are not used to thinking for themselves; are not prepared to think about issues; want to be told what to think and do not realise they are expected to do their own thinking’.)
• lack the prior subject and general knowledge required to be an effective learner at the VCE level (e.g. teachers commented that ‘many students have no sense of chronology or knowledge of history’ and need to be taught when key events occurred).
• may find it more difficult to access learning resources.
• think that they get by with little effort and are ‘unprepared for the jump in work demands’ or have ‘unrealistic expectations about their likely success based on their success in years 7-10’.